**Title**: **The Changing Nature of Postmodern Realities in Select Fictions of Haruki Murakami, Veronica Roth and Suzanne Collins: A Study**

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**Synopsis**

The modernist perception of reality emphasized the presence of an underlying reality. Rational thinking and empiricism were long taken as roads which allow a person to gain knowledge. The nature of such knowledge was unchanging and was taken to be universal. The reality stemming from such knowledge wasalso assumed to be of a universal nature. Knowledge for the modernists held the power to master the world. Knowledge was assigned with the role to lead man towards a better future. Perhaps it was assigned with the role of improving the living conditions of man and to guide him towards a utopian promised land. However such grand narratives of development and empowerment for all of mankind proved to be a façade as was shown by the two great world wars, the large scale productions of nuclear bombs in several nations and the threat of the cold war. These crises arise as a result of the firm belief in the nature of modernist knowledge which was considered to stem from a singular perception of reality. The postmodern perception of reality originated as a response to the modernist perception of the same. It questions the existence of underlying realities as it treats everything as a construction of the society and more importantly by those in the position of power in the society. It promotes the plural possibilities of what was once assumed to be the real. Since everything is apparently constructed, the presence of an underlying objective truth is also rejected and the participation in the free play of signifiers is advocated. The play allows the creation of selves, subcultures and parallel realities. As signs give way to the creation of more signs, similarly parallel realities create the platform for the free play of signifiers. Fictions dealing with parallel realities provide the scope for the chain reaction of significations to progress. The question which arises at this point is what happens in the near future if mankind only participates in the free play of signifiers, which discourage the attempt to look for any kind of truth. How will the society of the future appear without any fundamental perception of the real guiding man?I will try to locate the answers of these problems in the selected works of the following authors Haruki Murakami, Veronica Roth and Suzanne Collins.

Haruki Murakami is often identified as a postmodern author; however he refuses to limit himself to any such categorization. I will consult his works like *Kafka on the Shore* and *Sputnik Sweetheart* to trace above mentioned problems. *Kafka on the Shore* presents multiple narratives where a boy who has ran away from his home fears his oedipal fate exists the world of Nakata, a man capable of talking to cats. Both of them travel to different alternate worlds to gain self awareness. *Sputnik Sweetheart* on the other hand also speaks of Sumire who finds solace in an alternate realm and rejects the real world which she inhabited earlier in the novel. The narrator participates in the pursuit of the missing Sumire as the narrative progresses.

Veronica Roth's *Divergent Trilogy* will be another primary text. It speaks of a dystopic world where people are divided into factions as they reach a certain age. They are expected to sever any previous ties before resuming their lives where they are meant to fulfil the role they have chosen. The factions are pre-decided but the process of selection gives the impression that they have a choice. The divergent is a person who does not belong to just one faction and exhibits characteristics of several other factions and they are perceived as threats to a stable society.

Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games Trilogy* also has a dystopic setting. The capitol is all powerful and it constantly attempts to suppress the districts situated at the periphery. The 'hunger games' is an annual event which has been designed to discourage the districts from ever questioning the authority of the capitol. A male and a female candidate are chosen from every district from these districts who essentially slay each other and the last man standing becomes the winner.

The liberal economic model of democracy in the contemporary society is perhaps being questioned by the authors like Roth, Collins and Murakami. Roth's and Collins's worlds are dystopias and both refer to a great war which has perhaps led to the creation of the present dystopic state. So are these authors expressing doubt about the present state of affairs of the governments of the world? This demands our attention. Moreover Murakami is perhaps also not entirely satisfied with the present governing models. Though his fictions apparently do not portray a dystopia, yet they express dissatisfaction with the world his characters inhabit. They often find solace or peace in a parallel reality which is removed from the world the readers and the characters see every day. The familiar picture of reality as the reader knows it is tweaked by these authors. Human ideals are emphasized in times of distress and an attempt to better the relationships with fellow human beings is made. Communication gains relevance where the generated meaning is not elusive. The postmodern society is bereft of the existence of certain unchanging 'truths'. It does not portray knowledge as the path towards a better tomorrow, but these authors' reveal the dubious narratives used by those in power to control the oppressed classes of the society. The oppressed classes come together and through their collective effort overthrow the oppressors under the guidance of a hero. The heroic deeds and the narrative of the hero unite the remaining sections of the society. A struggle towards a better 'world' is always present which perhaps challenge the existing notions of postmodern awareness. Suzanne Collins through the media of Panem shows how the hyperreal society of Panem accepts the simulations as realities, but she also shows how all the districts but the capitol is rejecting such propagandas spread by the media. The fictional universes being considered in this thesis are therefore attempting to locate hope of a better future and a purpose of life. Even if the present inhabited by the characters is not ideal, they work to groom the society which may bloom into a utopia someday. Murakami apparently does not call for revolution to improve the society, he is perhaps too sceptical of war. Instead, he transcends the suffocating reality altogether in search of a better and more fulfilling realm.

The 'popular' readers of fiction perhaps desire something more from contemporary fiction. This desire for something more is perhaps reflecting the break between the contemporary readers (especially among the young adult readers) of fiction and postmodernism. Young adult fictions like the *Hunger Games* trilogy and the *Divergent* trilogy portray a protagonist combating an oppressive regime or society to liberate the oppressed. The protagonists refuse to conform to the 'identities' already decided by those in power and they try to purge the society from such limited

perceptions. Interestingly Murakami's fictions do not strictly cater the young adult readers, yet his works grant a somewhat vague redemption for his characters. They often find themselves in a fragmented world of converging realities, yet the fictions conclude with the characters gaining a self awareness. They may not bring a change in the society as Roth's and Collin's protagonists are capable of, but Murakami's characters liberate their self from the overpowering grasps of their earlier selves. Murakami's texts which are often hailed as postmodernist texts therefore deals with an attempt of're-humanization' of his characters.

The bloom of young adult bestsellers dealing with dystopias and the rise of the heroic figure to combat oppressive systems of governance is one of the contemporary trends of the culture and publishing industry. It demands our attention to look into the politics which are leading to such a phenomenon. The heroic figure also finds his way into other forms of narratives like computer games and popular films. The boundaries of text are being blurred in the contemporary scenario.

The texts also show certain developments which can be briefly categorized under the term 'post-postmodern'. The post-postmodern can be further divided tagged under certain emerging rubrics like metamodernism, digimodernism, pseudo-modernism, alter-modernism, etc. Francis Fukuyama claims that liberal democracy is the end of history and it will lead to a probable utopia in the future. However Derrida argues that liberal democracy does not provide equal living conditions to every sections of the society, thus like ghosts old ideas shall creep into the modern context to shape the future. A quite similar idea is being proposed through metamodernism, which states that the post-postmodern condition is marked by a continuous oscillation between what the modern and the postmodern. Thus like spectres some of the modern ideas of enlightenment are combining with the postmodern perception of the real to shape the present and the future.

At present I have tentatively divided the argument into five chapters. The first chapter will introduce the area I am working on. It will discuss the evolution of the perception of the real. It will also briefly address the emerging potential texts like facebook and video games. The second, third and fourth chapters will deal with Murakami, Roth and Collins and their treatment of postmodern realities. The fifth chapter will attempt to conclude the findings from the previous chapters.

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